

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8045
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
USLO RIYADH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN NY
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2822

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINR, PINT, PLO
SUBJECT: HANI AL-HASAN CLAIMS PLO FOILED "CHAMOUN-IRAQI PLOT"

1. IN RECENT CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN BUSINESSMAN IN
BEIRUT HANI AL-HASAN, A KEY ARAFAT ADVISOR, TOLD HIM THAT
RECENT OUTBREAK OF FIGHTING BETWEEN FRENCH AND PALESTINIANS
AT TYRE WAS PART OF A TWO-PRONGED "CHAMOUN-IRAQI PLOT"
WHICH HAD BEEN PARTIALLY FOILED BY ARAFAT. ACCORDING TO
AL-HASAN, CHAMOUN IS IN CONTACT WITH IRAQIS, CHAMOUN
HOPES TO "INTERNATIONALIZE" THE CONFLICT AND IRAQ WANTS
CHAMOUN'S HELP IN REMOVING SYRIAN PRESENCE FROM LEBANON.
AL-HASAN CHARGED THAT IRAQI-SPONSORED MEN WERE SUPPOSED
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TO FOMENT TROUBLE IN BEIRUT AT THE SAME TIME THAT CLASHES
WITH FRENCH FORCES WERE PROVOKED IN TYRE. BEIRUT INCIDENTS
DID NOT OCCUR BECAUSE ARAFAT HAD ARRESTED 106 OF THESE MEN
IN BEIRUT (SOURCE WAS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THIS WAS THE ARREST
OF ABU DAUD FOLLOWERS OR A SEPARATE OPERATION). HASAN BELIEVED
THAT CHAMOUN HAD HOPED TO USE INCIDENTS AS A PRETEXT TO OBTAIN
GREATER FRENCH INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON.

2. AL-HASAN CLAIMED THAT, FOLLOWING THE ISRAELI-PLO BATTLES IN SOUTH LEBANON, PLO GROUPS WERE BEING FLOODED WITH VOLUNTEERS INCLUDING THOUSANDS OF ARAB UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. HE SAID THE PLO GROUPS WERE BEING SELECTIVE SINCE MANPOWER WAS NOT A BIG PROBLEM. (THIS WOULD SEEM IN CONTRADICTION TO REPORTS THAT YOUNG BOYS ARE FIGHTING FOR THE PLO IN THE SOUTH.)

3. SOURCE'S IMPRESSION WAS THAT AL-HASAN CLEARLY RECOGNIZED THE NEED TO COOPERATE WHENEVER POSSIBLE WITH SYRIA. CAIRO ACCORD WAS ALL THE PALESTINIANS HAD, AND THEY WOULD FIGHT BITTERLY TO PRESERVE THEIR PRESENCE IN LEBANON. BUT THEY REALIZED THAT ULTIMATELY SYRIAN SUPPORT WAS CRUCIAL. AL-HASAN TOLD BUSINESSMAN THAT ARAFAT DELIBERATELY AVOIDED MEETING NUMEIRI ON LATTER'S SWING THROUGH SYRIA WHEN SYRIANS MADE IT APPARENT THAT THEY DID NOT WANT SUCH A MEETING TO OCCUR.

4. BUSINESSMAN CONCURRED THAT SYRIANS BADLY WANTED ISRAELIS OUT OF SOUTH LEBANON AND TO THAT END WOULD RESTRAIN SAIQA AND JIBRIL'S PFLP-GC. ANY MILITANT STATEMENTS COMING FROM EITHER ZUHAIR MUHSIN OR JIBRIL, HE CONTENDED, SHOULD BE DISCOUNTED AS MERE "OVER BIDDING."
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